



## Elementary School Children “Go for the Gold”

### Producing Results

Among participating schools, miles walked increased from 800,000 miles in 2001 to 2,692,429 miles in 2004 (equal to 5.4 round-trips to the moon). The percentage of schools in Utah with a policy of physical activity for 90 minutes per week for each child increased from 13 percent to 100 percent. Schools reported that the program was instrumental in decreasing violence on the playground, increasing attention in the classroom, and increasing interest in being physically active.

### Public Health Problem

In Utah, as in the rest of the nation, approximately 25 percent of the children are overweight or at risk for being overweight (higher than the 85th percentile of standards on CDC's growth charts), and 12 percent are overweight (higher than the 95th percentile). Lack of policies and infrastructures to promote and support opportunities for physical activity and healthy nutrition are contributing to the epidemic of obesity among school-aged children. Utah used approximately \$175,000 of its PHHS Block Grant funds to support the Gold Medal School Initiative for elementary school children.

### Taking Action

The Utah Department of Health, the Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention Program, the State Office of Education, and local health departments created the Gold Medal School Initiative. This elementary school incentive program helps schools adopt a healthy culture by making policy and environmental changes to receive funding for physical activity equipment or salad bars. Changes encourage more opportunities for physical activity during the school day and better nutrition and healthier food choices.

Schools are given a menu of award criteria to achieve, including: establishing a Gold Medal Mile track on or near school grounds, and setting a goal for student participation (at least 1 mile per week for each child); setting a policy for at least 90 minutes of structured physical activity for each student per week; and offering salad bars, providing more nutritious food choices in school stores and in the cafeteria, and limiting choices in vending machines to healthy items. Evaluation of the impact on obesity will begin in year four of the initiative - the first three years were needed to develop policies and change the school environments.

### Implications and Impact

During school years 2001-2004, the following accomplishments were achieved: 1) the number of schools participating increased from 50 to 138; 2) nonfood incentives and rewards have been offered to students by 3,039 teachers; and 3) schools report that new healthy policies and environmental supports (about 10 per school) have been instrumental in decreasing violence on the playground and waste of food and in increasing attention in the classroom, participation in school lunch, and interest in being physically active.

### Contact Information

Utah Department of Health - PHHS Block Grant Coordinator  
 288 North 1460 West - Salt Lake City, UT 84116  
 Phone: 801-538-6220 [www.health.utah.gov](http://www.health.utah.gov)  
<http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/exemplary>